

## VOTE - Voter Outreach Through Education Washington Secretary of State

### UNITED STATES AND WORLD CURRICULUM GRADES 8-12 STUDENT HANDOUT, LESSON 10

#### THEME: IS THEIR WAY BETTER?

Soon after passage of the Voting Rights Act, federal examiners were conducting voter registration drives, and black voter registration began a sharp increase. The cumulative effect of the Supreme Court's decisions, Congress' enactment of voting rights legislation, the ongoing efforts of concerned private citizens and the Department of Justice was to implement the right to vote guaranteed by the 14th and 15th Amendments.

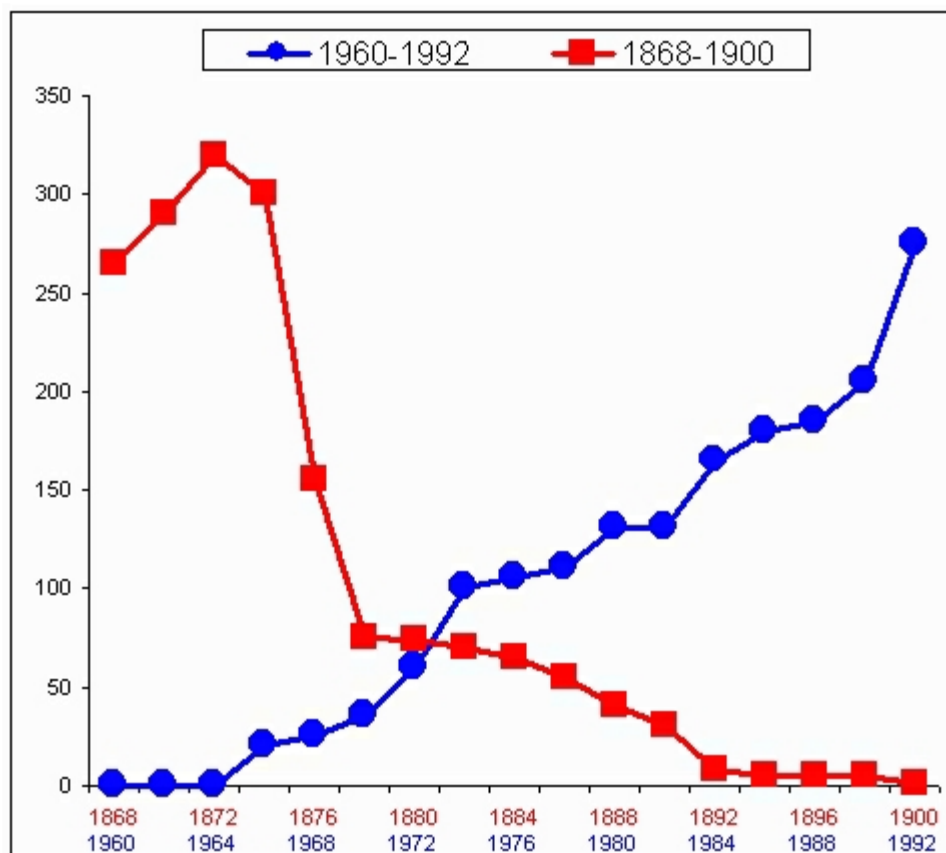
The following table compares black voter registration rates with white voter registration rates in seven Southern states in 1965 and 1988.

**Voter Registration Rates (1965 vs. 1988)**

	<u>March 1965</u>			<u>November 1988</u>		
	Black	White	Gap	Black	White	Gap
<b>Alabama</b>	19.3	69.2	49.9	68.4	75.0	6.6
<b>Georgia</b>	27.4	62.6	35.2	56.8	63.9	7.1
<b>Louisiana</b>	31.6	80.5	48.9	77.1	75.1	-2.0
<b>Mississippi</b>	6.7	69.9	63.2	74.2	80.5	6.3
<b>North Carolina</b>	46.8	96.8	50.0	58.2	65.6	7.4
<b>South Carolina</b>	37.3	75.7	38.4	56.7	61.8	5.1
<b>Virginia</b>	38.3	61.1	22.8	63.8	68.5	4.7

The following figure traces the number of black Southern legislators elected during two 32-year time periods -- from 1868 to 1900, and from 1960 to 1992.

**Number of Black Southern Legislators (1868-1900 and 1960-1992)**



Source: [United States Department of Justice](#)

1/ Adapted from Bernard Grofman, Lisa Handley and Richard G. Niemi. 1992. *Minority Representation and the Quest for Voting Equality*. New York: Cambridge University Press, at 23-24.

2/ Adapted from J. Morgan Kousser. 1999. *Colorblind Injustice: Minority Voting Rights and the Undoing of the Second Reconstruction*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, at 19.

An examination of the graph and the table on voter registration and voting by African-Americans quickly reveals the positive effects of the Civil Rights Act of 1965. When finally given legal protection to exercise their 14th and 15th Amendment right to vote, African-Americans overwhelmingly rose to the opportunity, their voting numbers swelled and they exercised their political power.

Today, the suffrage right of all citizens is not only guaranteed but it is also made increasingly more available. The **TIMELINE OF SUFFERAGE HISTORY** reveals that in the last quarter of this century, incredible steps have been taken to make not only voting but also voter registration easier and more accessible for all.

Often people who should exercise need a little nudge to get in the habit. Similarly, maybe citizens have grown a little out of shape in the exercise of their political power and they just need a nudge to get in the habit of voting. This might be the next addition to the historic road to suffrage for all; i.e., suffrage BY all.

We often learn by observing and one can observe that in several nations, like Australia, the citizens are required to vote. Perhaps theirs is a better way? Today we have universal suffrage but what about universal participation? Should it be given the status of DUTY? How can our society be one of rule by the people when a small percentage of us decide on issues and representation? Statistics reveal that compulsory voting laws are quite effective in raising levels of participation. Furthermore, we as citizens already have many obligations imposed on us for the good of society such as taxes, the draft and even mandatory schooling.

#### ACTIVITY:

Your mission is to formulate YOUR view on this topic. To help, first find out what other adults think about this controversial option to make voting a citizen DUTY.

You are to ask at least 10 citizens the questions listed below; half are to be in the age range 18-to-24, half are to be at least 30 years old. If you can, make a third group over 50 years old (for a total of 15 subjects). Try to achieve a gender balance as well in your choice of respondents.

Record their responses. It is essential that you write these down, in case batteries or tapes fail, but you might also want to employ a tape

recorder for later reference. If you do, make them comfortable by assuring the interviewees that you won't play their comments for the class.

When finished, calculate the results for Question #1, showing how many were polled and what percentages of those in each age category favored such a law. Also, combine similar responses to Questions #2 and #3, reducing them to the most typical comments and reasons.

Write a one-page paper that explains your survey and the results. Include both the statistics and the condensed narratives as well as your conclusions.

Questions:

1. We as citizens have certain obligations such as taxes, the draft and schooling. Would you support a federal law that also requires all citizens of the United States to register and to vote, as is done in Australia and some other nations, to increase citizen participation in the election process? Yes or No? Reasons?
2. If yes, what, if any, should be some legal excuses for not voting? (Examples might include religion, physical or mental impairment, illiteracy, incarceration.)
3. What should the sanctions (deterents or punishments) be for not voting?

Finally, share your results with the class. This can be done in the form of presentations and sharing OR in the form of a debate with some defending each side of this issue, using some of the reasons given to you by those you surveyed.

One question you might wish to consider as you form your own opinion on this issue: Why didn't the framers of the Constitution or any Congress or State Legislature since 1787 make voting compulsory?